



TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE

Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate

ON

“A Review of the President’s Supplemental Request for the  
Departments of Health and Human Services and Homeland Security”

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## **Introduction**

Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am proud to submit this testimony on behalf of the 260,000 people across our nation and around the world who make up the Department of Homeland Security (DHS or the Department). The people of DHS are our most important and vital resource. Serving alongside them is the greatest honor of my life and supporting them and their critical work has been my top priority since taking office.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to discuss critically needed funding to equip DHS with the people and tools it needs to prevent cartels from moving fentanyl through our Ports of Entry (POEs) and to enforce our immigration laws in an orderly, effective, and humane way. At this time of unprecedented hemispheric and global challenges, we must come together to strengthen our ability to protect the American people. I strongly urge Congress to give the men and women of DHS the resources and support they need to achieve our safety and security mission.

The Department continues to implement a border security strategy focused on enforcement, the expansion of lawful pathways, and agreements with regional partners. The plan has increased the number of law enforcement personnel along the border and the expedited removal of noncitizens without a legal basis to remain in the United States thanks to enhanced enforcement processes and historic diplomatic agreements. Since May 12, 2023, we have removed or returned over 336,000 individuals, including more than 50,000 individual family unit members. This compares to 225,000 removals and enforcement returns during the same period in 2019, which was the comparable pre-pandemic and pre-Title 42 period. At the same time, we have implemented the largest expansion of lawful pathways in decades. Progress has been made, but more funding is required to control the unprecedented flow of hemispheric migration and to increase our efforts to combat the Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) ruthlessly trafficking fentanyl and other deadly illicit drugs.

Last month, the Administration submitted a supplemental funding request to Congress that would provide \$8.7 billion for DHS to cover projected shortfalls, enhance enforcement and processing efficiencies, procure and operationalize the latest technologies, and hire additional personnel. It would also fund additional support for communities and nonprofit organizations receiving migrants, through the Shelter and Services Program (SSP).

To be clear, this supplemental funding is like a tourniquet — urgently needed and critical in the short-term, but not a long-term solution to a deep-seated problem. Our national immigration laws, having last gone through major revisions by Congress in 1996, are severely out-of-date and our system is completely broken. Only Congress can bring our immigration and border security systems into the 21st century. Our administration is eager to work with Congress to deliver for the American people and the men and women who protect our country.

Separately, the Administration submitted a supplemental funding request to Congress for \$9.2 billion for DHS that would fund support for communities facing violent extremism and communities facing extreme weather and climate disasters.

### **Countering Fentanyl**

The supplemental funding request includes more resources for the fight against fentanyl: \$1.2 billion for additional personnel and investigative capabilities to prevent cartels from moving fentanyl into the country, primarily through POEs. Through federal law enforcement efforts such as Operations Artemis, Rolling Wave, and Argus, CBP and ICE Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) have increased the interdiction of fentanyl, fentanyl precursors, and contraband such as pill presses. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, ICE HSI conducted more than 5,000 fentanyl-related arrests.

The funds in the supplemental funding request will enable both CBP and ICE to apply the lessons learned and combat the tactics of the TCOs that control the fentanyl trade. CBP would be able to hire 1,000 CBP Officers, make a significant investment in Non-Intrusive Inspection (NII) equipment deployment, and ICE HSI could enhance domestic and international counter-fentanyl activities, in coordination with domestic law enforcement agencies and the Department of State.

### **Securing the Border and Funding a Safe, Orderly, and Humane Immigration System**

As border encounter numbers continue to fluctuate, this Administration is committed to treating individuals and families humanely as we expedite the removal process and deliver tougher consequences under Title 8 of the United States Code for those who do not have a lawful basis to remain in the United States. The supplemental requests \$6 billion for border enforcement to reflect the evolving needs of the Department and funds additional resources for CBP, ICE, and USCIS to cover projected shortfalls and hire additional personnel to help right-size a system that was not built to manage the level of encounters we are experiencing.

CBP's requirements include an additional 1,300 Border Patrol Agents to work alongside the 20,205 agents requested in the FY 2024 President's Budget. The supplemental funding would also include 300 Border Patrol Processing Coordinators and support staff to help ensure Border Patrol Agents can focus on their critical national security mission in the field.

USCIS's requirements include an additional 1,600 Asylum Officers and associated support staff to hear migrant claims and facilitate timely immigration dispositions, including expedited removal for those without a valid claim to remain in the United States. As required by statute, expedited removal is not possible if USCIS Asylum Officers are not readily available to interview those asserting a fear of return. Supplemental funding will provide the critical resources USCIS needs to significantly expand its current credible fear interview capacity.

Additional ICE detention beds are needed to sustain the significantly increased use of expedited removal and provide necessary surge capacity. Increased surge capacity of up to 46,500 beds will allow DHS to process more border crossers on expedited timelines and swiftly

remove those without a legal basis to stay in the country. With more displaced persons in the hemisphere than ever before, it is of vital importance that we add this capacity in order to prevent overcrowding and dangerous conditions in Border Patrol facilities and avoid a high number of releases directly to border communities.

We are requesting additional funding for transportation, including an increase in removal flights and resources for Alternatives to Detention, in part to resource our Family Expedited Removal Management, or FERM, program. The supplemental funding request also includes funding to grow the Office of the Principal Legal Advisor with 1,470 additional attorneys and support staff to complement the Department of Justice's 375 new immigration judge teams to adjudicate and process immigration cases more quickly and help reduce the caseload backlog that has been building for years and years.

### **Support for Communities Receiving Migrants**

Through the Emergency Food and Shelter Program – Humanitarian and SSP, border and interior communities and nonprofit organizations receiving migrants have been allocated nearly \$800 million in FY 2023. The ongoing need and demand for support is tremendous; therefore, the supplemental funding request includes \$1.4 billion for additional SSP grants to local governments and non-profits for temporary food, shelter, and other services for recently arrived migrants.

Noncitizens who use a CBP One appointment to present themselves at a POE and those granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS) are eligible to apply immediately for work authorization, which enables them to support themselves and their families, reduce the burden on receiving cities, and contribute to the United States economy. We are taking steps to speed approval of work authorization applications for those who are eligible. Coupled with ongoing efforts to streamline and improve USCIS processing across all form types, the supplemental funding request will promote timely access to employment authorization documents for noncitizens.

### **Support for Communities Facing Extreme Weather and Climate Disasters**

To help communities recover from and rebuild after extreme weather events and natural disasters, an additional \$9 billion is required for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Disaster Relief Fund. This funding will enable FEMA to continue supporting critical response efforts and recovery projects in communities across the country. This includes support for recovery needs arising from specific disasters, including wildfires on Maui, the Guam typhoon, hurricanes in Florida and the southeastern United States, floods in California and Vermont, tornadoes in Mississippi, and other natural disasters across the country.

### **Support for Communities Facing Violent Extremism**

Additional funding is critical to ensuring the safety and security of faith-based communities currently facing an elevated threat environment. As we continue to monitor the unfolding events in Israel and Gaza, we must ensure our communities have the resources to be alert, vigilant, and prepared. The supplemental funding request would provide an additional

\$200 million for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, which would allow more nonprofit organizations across the nation to protect themselves against potential violent extremist or terrorist attacks.

## **Conclusion**

As DHS enters its third decade, the Department will continue to evolve and rise to the challenges posed by an ever-changing threat landscape. It is a great privilege to represent and serve alongside the DHS workforce that has time and again demonstrated exceptional skill and an unwavering commitment to keeping our country safe.

The President's Supplemental Budget Request includes the necessary funding and authorities for DHS to carry out its wide-ranging mission. I am grateful to this Committee for its continued support of DHS. I look forward to our continued work together and to answering your questions.